



CHIEF's Sight Picture

30 July 2003

Fit To Fight

Our superb Total Force performance in Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM secured our reputation as the greatest Air Force in the world. We should all take great pride in that. Our execution of the war plan was also consistent with our core values. Integrity, in that we upheld the highest standards of performance, learned from the things we could have done better, and will make ourselves better as a result; service before self, in that 40,000 warriors deployed forward, supported by thousands more back home, to do the right thing for the people of Iraq and to play our part in the joint air, land, and sea effort; and excellence, in that we demonstrated the ability to plan and execute air and space missions with a degree of precision never before achieved. When looking at our Air Force overall, I am very pleased. One aspect of our Total Force that does need improvement, however, is our physical fitness.

About ten years ago, we transitioned to fitness testing based on the cycle ergometry test. This was done to preclude injuries experienced in the previous 1.5-mile run format. It was also deemed a more precise and high-tech way to measure aerobic performance. My belief is that we are a much different Air Force today. We deploy to all regions of the world, living in tent cities and working on flight lines in extremes of temperatures. Some of our airmen today are operating from inside Iraq, subject to attack, and could be called upon to help defend the base, a trend that will surely increase in the growing expeditionary nature of our business. The amount of energy we devote to our fitness programs is not consistent with the growing demands of our warrior culture. It's time to change that.

We will soon release a new fitness program that gets back to the basics of running, sit-ups, and pushups. There will be accommodations made for those who aren't able to run for legitimate reasons. The cycle ergometry test may still be used for those not medically cleared to run. We are planning to issue physical training (PT) gear as part of the program and to put responsibility for PT in the chain of command, not with the medical community or the commander's support staff. I expect this effort to be led from the top, starting with commanders and senior NCOs, and I expect those who have trouble meeting the standards to be helped by others in their unit until they do meet the standard. Physical fitness should also be an area of concern for the Air Force civil servants. I encourage the civilian members of our Air Force organizations to join with their uniformed peers in participating in this program.

While we have weight and body fat standards that we must meet, there will be some, weightlifters in particular, who may be perfectly fit but not meet these standards. This is where I expect commanders to step in and make a decision. Everyone will have to pass the commander's eyeball test about how fit we are to wear the uniform. Every year we muster out about 400 people from our Air Force because of fitness issues. We should ask ourselves how many of those people were really trying to meet the standard and how many leaders and supervisors took an active part -- getting out and running with them, etc. -- in helping them meet the standard.

We will start this program on 1 January 2004 so there is plenty of time for us to get ready. You can use me as a benchmark. I am currently recovering from abdominal surgery and am not allowed to run for another two weeks. I won't be able to do any sit-ups for another month. During the first week in January I plan to lead all Air Force General Officers in the Pentagon and the Washington, DC area in the PT test. During the same week, Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Murray will do the same thing with our Command Chiefs in the area. We will follow that with the colonels, the remaining chief master sergeants, etc. We will ask the MAJCOM commanders to lead similar efforts as their operational situations allow.

I think all of us can agree that we were disappointed with the fitness standards we found when we came into the operational Air Force. We expected to be required to sustain the standards required in basic training, the Air Force Academy, ROTC, or Officer Training School. Let's not disappoint ourselves any longer. The message is simple: if you are out of shape, fix it. If you have people in your squadron who need help, help them. January 2004 is the date. Be ready.



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